



Crab Orchard

National Wildlife Refuge

Project Update

September 2001

Inside This Issue

History and Background of Crab Orchard NWR /	2
The Comprehensive Conservation Plan Process /	3
Public Input to the Process /	3
Framework for Developing Alternatives /	5
Alternative A: Existing Management /	6
Alternative B: Recreational Land Exchange /	7
Alternative C: Open Land Management /	9
Alternative D: Forest Land Management /	9
The Future is Now /	11



The Future of Crab Orchard NWR is Now

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has made four management alternatives for Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge available for public review and comment.

The management alternatives are the foundation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) the Service is developing for Crab Orchard Refuge. The alternatives present general concepts of possible future management directions and were developed after reviewing the refuge mission and purpose, public comments and biological information. After thoroughly reviewing these alternatives, the Service will select a "preferred" alternative

and develop a detailed Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The CCP, once completed, will guide refuge management decisions for the next 15 years.

These alternatives are being presented to help the local community understand that the Service is considering all public comments and a wide range of management alternatives to develop its EIS and CCP. "Management decisions will affect where, when and how people can enjoy the refuge," said new Refuge Manager Rick Frietsche. "We want interested citizens to take a look at what we have so far and let us know if we have missed

anything. Right now, the Service does not consider any of these a preferred alternative. No decisions have been made, but we are beginning to move into the decision making phase and if people have comments, we want to hear them before we get too far along in the planning process.”

“I want to ensure everyone has a chance to be aware of, and comment on, these management plans so there are no surprises,” said Frietsche, adding that the Service is not legally required to provide public review or accept public comments at this phase of the planning effort. “Even though I’m not required to do this, I want to involve all our partners throughout the entire process so we can address issues early. This refuge benefits all of us and I want to discuss any issues before they become problems.”

“I realize it is unlikely we will please everyone,” added Frietsche. “But, I want to work with the State of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, recreation groups, environmental groups, agriculture, industry and other interested citizens to develop a plan that meets as many public needs as possible while still fulfilling all the purposes for which this refuge was established.”

History and Background of Crab Orchard NWR

Crab Orchard was established through legislation on August 5, 1947. It has four purposes: “....for the conservation of wildlife and



Rick Frietsche, Manager of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge

for the development of agriculture, recreation, industrial and related purposes...” Located west of Marion, on the northern edge of the Ozark foothills, the 43,890-acre refuge includes three artificially created lakes totaling 8,700 surface acres. The refuge landscape also includes hardwood and pine forests, croplands, grasslands, wetlands, rolling hills and rugged terrain. The 4,050-acre Crab Orchard Wilderness, the

first wilderness area designated in the state of Illinois, is within the refuge.

Crab Orchard is unique in the National Wildlife Refuge System in having an industrial program that generates \$40 million annually toward the regional economy. The refuge is also the only national wildlife refuge to have resident youth camps, such as those operated by Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and United Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The refuge also hosts several marinas, campgrounds and a private boat and yacht club.

The refuge supports an estimated 1.2 million visitors annually, and its recreation programs contribute \$25 million to the local tourism economy. Public use opportunities currently include an auto tour route, hiking trails, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, boating, swimming, camping, and picnicking.



Playport Marina, 1961

Before becoming a refuge, the site hosted several industries, including military ordinance manufacturing plants. Since becoming a refuge, the existing industrial sites have been leased to various tenants. Because of certain past industrial practices, portions of the refuge are contaminated and considered EPA Superfund sites. Some of the contaminated areas have been cleaned and others are currently undergoing clean-up and Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) processes.

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan Process

In 1997, the U.S. Congress mandated that a CCP be prepared for each of the more than 535 refuges within the National Wildlife Refuge System. These long-term plans will guide management decisions and identify refuge goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving the Refuge System Mission. The plans provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the desired conditions of the refuge and how the Service will implement management strategies. Crab Orchard Refuge began developing their CCP in 1999 and expects to complete it in 2003.

The next step in the CCP process is for the Service to review and further develop each of the four alternatives based upon public comments, biological data, and the Service and refuge missions. Once enough information has been gathered, the Service will select a "preferred" alternative and analyze its impacts in detail. Once this is completed, the Service will compile all information in a Draft Environmental

Impact Statement and Comprehensive Conservation Plan and distribute these documents for public review and comment. The Service expects to have these draft documents available for review in early 2002.

"Developing management alternatives is a multi-step process that involves the collection, review and incorporation of voluminous biological and historical data, economic information, public comments and public laws," said Frietsche. "As people begin to look at these long-term plans, I want them to understand the diverse interests at play on the refuge. The other important thing to remember is that nothing has been decided. But, the future is now. People need to get involved and let us know what they think."

Public Input to the Process

In late 2000 the refuge began collecting public input through a series of open house and focus group meetings. In October 2000, over 300 citizens attended three open house meetings hosted by the refuge staff. In January 2001, the refuge staff invited 39 diverse stakeholders to attend three focus groups meetings to discuss and prioritize issues facing the refuge. The refuge began officially accepting written comments in January 2000 and has received and reviewed over 280 written comments to date. In addition, five petitions containing more than 6,100 names were submitted. The public represented by these comments include a variety of interests and organizations, including on-refuge industrial and agricultural businesses; local businesses; educational institutions; recreational organizations (i.e. hunting, fishing, and youth

camps); environmental and conservation organizations; federal, state and local government entities and many private citizens.

The full text of public input events conducted between October 2000 and March 2001 is available at <http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/cotop.htm>

Overall Public Input

Most topics raised during the meetings, in comment letters, and in petitions can be organized into four primary categories: 1) recreation, 2) wildlife conservation, 3) refuge purposes, and 4) recreational boating.

Recreation was the most frequently commented on issue. All facets of recreation were addressed, including concern for loss of recreation; desire to maintain existing recreational facilities; support, maintenance and enhancement of all forms of recreation; and to expand, improve, reopen and/or add new facilities or activities to the refuge. Comments were also made about the poor or

"As people begin to look at these long-term plans, I want them to understand the diverse interests at play on the refuge. The other important thing to remember is that nothing has been decided. But, the future is now. People need to get involved and let us know what they think."

Rick Frietsche
Manager, Crab Orchard

inadequate conditions of some of the facilities, including marinas, boat ramps, restrooms, and campgrounds.

Comments made to expand, improve, re-open and/or add new facilities or activities to the refuge covered a wide range of topics. Some people would like to see the refuge expand and improve by adding restaurants, marinas, hotels, restrooms, bike trails, hiking trails, disposal containers, roads, a shooting range, dog training areas, horse trails and gas stations. Many others would like to see the refuge re-open swimming areas, picnic areas, and sailing facilities. Others requested less developed recreational activities and more wildlife related improvements such as the addition of nature walks, environmental education programs and water quality monitoring.

Another issue identified by the public was wildlife conservation. The public voiced the need to conserve and protect wildlife populations as well as their habitat. People feel that game and non-game species should be protected; threatened and endangered species should be protected; habitats should be preserved; and restoration efforts should be properly employed. Specific comments address protection of bald eagles, supporting large numbers of Canada geese and ensuring acceptable levels of game fish.

A third issue - support for the intended purposes of the refuge and concern for compatibility of refuge purposes - was identified as critical to the refuge. People who wrote or spoke to this concern tended to feel that refuge management has not properly



Recreation has been the most frequently commented on issue in public meetings, comment cards, letters and petitions.

emphasized or supported the four original purposes for which the refuge was established. Others stated that the refuge should not support all of its purposes and some expressed concern that these very purposes may now be considered incompatible with the overall mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, due to recent legislation and changing policies in the Service.

A fourth issue - recreational boating and its proper regulation - was also addressed. There was strong support for the continuation and encouragement of recreational boating at Crab Orchard. At the same time, the commenting public recognized actual and potential conflicts among and between boaters and other recreational users of the lakes. Some comments requested the reduction of certain boating activities including jet-skis, water skiing and sail boats. Other comments on regulation of boating include installing speed limits, removing "no wake" signs, and restricting the size of motorized vessels.

The next few issues were found to be common between the meetings and the letters. These issues include: elimination of deforestation and logging on the refuge; maintaining open and agricultural fields and support of farming practices for both wildlife habitat and food supply; promoting compatible trail use (including opposition to all-terrain vehicles and off-road vehicles); and opposition to user fees.

Some issues were identified as top issues in the focus group meetings, but not in the letters. These issues include the benefits the refuge provides to the local economy and the need for better communication between the Service and the community.

In conclusion, it appears that public input is highly supportive of the four original purposes for which the refuge was established. The public believes that over the decades Crab Orchard management has strayed from implementing these original purposes, at least in terms of how they are defined or emphasized. Indeed, in

recent years historical, non-wildlife-dependent recreational uses have been scaled back and more emphasis has been placed on the Refuge System's six priority wildlife-dependent public uses - hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation.

It should be noted that public involvement in the EIS and CCP process to date has been heavily oriented toward local stakeholders. As the process unfolds, however, a Draft CCP and EIS will be made available to a national audience, which may represent a somewhat different orientation and set of values than local stakeholders. If experience elsewhere is a guide, national organizations and the individuals they represent may put more emphasis on the general "Wildlife Comes First" mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System than local stakeholders.

"As you can see, we pretty much have the entire spectrum of possibilities to consider here," said Frietsche. "The challenge

for the CCP planning team and refuge management will be to forge an optimal path through these diverse, sometimes competing interests, legislative mandates, and biological constraints and opportunities."

The Service is encouraging individuals and organizations to submit written comments to: Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, Attn: CCP Comments, 8588 Route 148, Marion, IL 62959; or via the Internet at: <http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/cotop.htm>; or by e-mail to: conwr-ccp@fws.gov.

Framework for Developing the Alternatives

"In order to get the process moving and accomplish anything, we reviewed all the comments, rules and regulations we have to work with and identified some needs that must be fulfilled," said Crab Orchard Refuge Manager Rick Frietsche. "We needed some

"The challenge for the CCP planning team and refuge management will be to forge an optimal path through these diverse, sometimes competing interests, legislative mandates, and biological constraints and opportunities."

Rick Frietsche
Manager, Crab Orchard NWR

side-boards to keep us focused on the task." The CCP planning team chose five needs that all alternatives must address to be considered. The five needs are:

- provide adequate habitat for wintering geese;
- ensure biological integrity through reduction of habitat fragmentation, control of exotic species, and expanded biological inventories;
- foster community support through better communication;
- ensure that all agriculture provides wildlife benefits; and
- accelerate restoration of abandoned industrial sites to wildlife habitat.

"In addition to the needs, we also identified some things that weren't feasible," continued Frietsche. These were: (1) reestablishment of pre-settlement habitat conditions; (2) elimination of all recreation except hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation; and (3) removal of industry from the refuge purposes.



Crab Orchard Lake Beach

Using all the comments received, considering all the rules and regulations that must be followed and considering the given needs and impossibilities, the refuge developed the following four possible management alternatives:

Alternative A: Existing Management

Alternative B: Recreational Land Exchange

Alternative C: Open Land Management

Alternative D: Forest Land Management

The following is a brief discussion of the major management points in the alternatives. It is important to note that the alternatives are very general in nature. Specific details for each alternative have not yet been developed.

Alternative A: Existing Management

What does it mean for the Refuge?

Under this alternative, current management techniques at the refuge would continue. "This alternative is a legal requirement and provides a base of comparison for all other alternatives," said Frietsche. "We need to look at what is happening now to help us understand how any changes we may implement would affect the future."

What does it mean for fish and wildlife?

Current wetland management would continue. The refuge would continue efforts to protect water quality by focusing within the refuge boundaries. These efforts would include using best management practices on agricultural lands (including haying and grazing) and stabilizing

lakeshores. The refuge would continue to avoid impacts to nesting bald eagles and Indiana bat habitat and continue current wilderness management, which includes the gradual conversion of non-native pines to native deciduous forests

What does it mean for recreation?

All current recreation uses and patterns on the refuge would continue. There would be a continued decline in support for swimming, power boating and water skiing. There would be a gradual increase in the quality of other recreational facilities. However, at current levels of improvement, it will take many years to bring the quality of the campgrounds to acceptable standards for the area. Hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation would continue at the current level with gradual improvement. Management of public use in the wilderness would continue at its current level.

What does it mean for industry?

Current industrial policies would remain in place and the refuge would provide facilities for the existing tenants at fair market value rental rates.

What does it mean for agriculture?

Currently there are approximately 5,000 acres in cropland and 2,000 acres in grassland. The amount of agricultural land would remain fairly constant. However some loss would occur as marginal croplands are taken out of production and reforested. Current pastures would remain.

Alternative B: Recreational Land Exchange

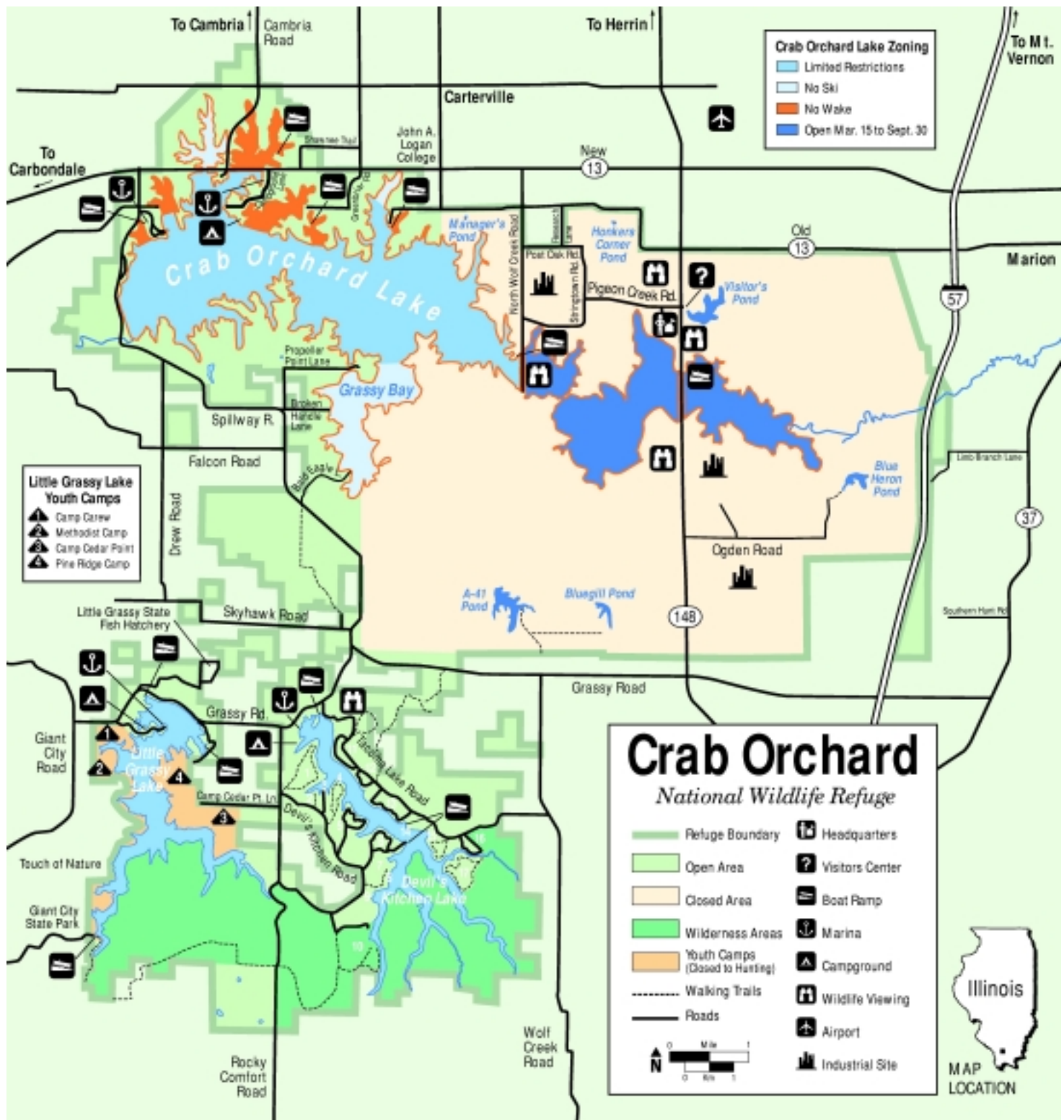
What does it mean for the Refuge?

Under this alternative, management emphasis would be on reducing habitat fragmentation and reconciling conflicts between the Refuge's recreation purpose and the Refuge System mission by focusing on wildlife-dependent recreation on the refuge while still providing a full spectrum of recreational activities in the area.

"This alternative recognizes that a national wildlife refuge is not a state park or other high-intensity recreation area," said Frietsche. "Refuges are excellent at many things, but providing the public with the type and volume of non-wildlife-dependent recreational activities currently prevalent at Crab Orchard isn't necessarily one of them." The main point of this alternative is to offer increased recreational opportunities by exchanging land in the developed northwestern portion of Crab Orchard lake for undeveloped land at another location.

"It's important to note that this alternative is not about abandoning our fish and wildlife responsibilities," continued Frietsche. "The land we are considering to remove from the refuge is highly-developed with limited fish and wildlife management possibilities." The area under consideration is directly adjacent to New Route 13 and includes two marinas, parking lots, picnic areas and a campground. "We are proposing to trade this historically highly-developed area for undeveloped areas that will provide higher quality habitat for wildlife."

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge





Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge provides habitat for diverse wildlife species, including Canada geese. Photo by Thomas G. Barnes

What does it mean for fish and wildlife?

This alternative eliminates much of the fragmented nature of habitat on the refuge. The refuge currently has many scattered tracts of grassland and forest intermixed with each other. "Ideally, this alternative would allow us to manage these scattered tracts and eventually turn them into larger contiguous tracts of grassland and forest," said Frietsche. "These larger tracts eliminate much of the edge habitat preferred by predators and will provide greatly needed habitat for grassland birds and forest interior species."

The refuge would minimize fragmentation of habitats important to area sensitive birds and accelerate conversion of non-native pine to hardwood forest. There would be more forested lands than under current management techniques. The refuge would take an expanded approach to enhancing water quality by increasing efforts in the watershed, as well as on the refuge. Efforts to inventory and assess the status of Federal and State

threatened and endangered species would increase.

The refuge would take a more active approach to wilderness management. If evaluations indicated a need and opportunity, the designated wilderness may be expanded to protect the Devils Kitchen watershed and the refuge would increase biological monitoring and resource protection activities within the wilderness. Horseback use would be directed outside the wilderness area and non-native pines would be removed.

What does it mean for recreation?

The Service would try to reconcile conflicts between the Refuge's recreation purpose and the Refuge System Mission through a land exchange with Southern Illinois University or other interested parties. The Service would propose exchanging the highly-developed northwestern corner of the refuge for undeveloped land at the southern boundary of the refuge. The recipient of the exchange would have ownership and management responsibil-

ity for the area and could offer non-wildlife-dependent recreation such as camping, boating, or swimming at their discretion.

Under this alternative the refuge would maintain current use restrictions on Crab Orchard Lake and seek legislation further defining refuge recreation to include only wildlife-dependent uses on refuge land. Group camps would be managed with an emphasis on the Refuge System Mission. The refuge would focus on improving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation (the Refuge System's big-six wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities) on refuge lands. The local area could offer a complete spectrum of recreational opportunities ranging from developed, non-wildlife-dependent, recreation in the northwestern corner of Crab Orchard Lake to wildlife-dependent opportunities at Little Grassy and Devils Kitchen Lakes. Campgrounds at both Little Grassy and Devils Kitchen Lakes would be upgraded. Primitive campsites would be added on Devils Kitchen Lake, where gas motors would be prohibited. This diversity of recreational opportunities between the sites would offer the public a complete package of recreational experiences.

What does it mean for industry?

Under this alternative, the refuge would update the industrial use policy with the intent of not promoting expansion and reducing the industrial footprint on the refuge through attrition. The Service would encourage new industrial expansion in neighboring industrial parks with newer and more appropriate facilities.

"This alternative, and all the other alternatives, recognize that industry will always be part of the refuge," said Frietsche. "However, the refuge's continued support of industry actually competes against the surrounding communities who also want industry to help increase their tax base. This alternative provides support for existing industry on the refuge while promoting industrial expansion into neighboring communities."

What does it mean for agriculture?

Existing cropland fields would be consolidated and there may be fewer total cropland acres; sufficient acreage would be provided for the needs of wintering geese. Haying and grazing regimes would be modified to benefit geese as well as grassland birds. Pastures would be converted to native habitats over a period of 15 years.

Alternative C: Open Land Management

What does it mean for the Refuge?

Under this alternative, management emphasis would be on open land habitats, satisfying the refuge's recreation purpose as much as possible within Service budget priorities and expanding wildlife-dependent recreation. "The intent of this alternative," said Frietsche "is to emphasize management of open land habitat, such as grassland and agricultural land, for the benefit of wildlife...particularly birds."

What does it mean for fish and wildlife?

Cropland, grassland, and early successional vegetation types would increase at the expense of

forest habitats. Pastures would be converted to native grasslands over 15 years and managed with fire and grazing to benefit grassland birds. Acres devoted to moist soil management would increase. Sufficient habitat would be provided for the needs of wintering geese. Efforts to protect water quality within the refuge boundary would continue and impacts to nesting bald eagles and Indiana bat habitat would be avoided.

The wilderness area would maintain its existing size and the refuge would increase resource protection within the wilderness. Non-native pines would not be removed from the wilderness area.

What does it mean for recreation? To reconcile non-wildlife-dependent recreational activities, the refuge would consolidate marinas and picnic areas, upgrade existing boat ramps, maintain the existing two beaches and designate times and places for the various types of boating activities. Camping capacity would be reduced, the quality of camping facilities would be upgraded and a two-week maximum stay policy would be implemented. A spectrum of recreational opportunities ranging from more developed recreation at Crab Orchard Lake to less developed opportunities at Devils Kitchen Lake would be provided. Campgrounds at Little Grassy and Devils Kitchen Lakes would be upgraded and primitive campsites added on Devils Kitchen Lake, where gas motors would be prohibited. Opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation would increase. Group camps would eventually be

phased-out through attrition. Horseback use would be rerouted outside of the wilderness area.

What does it mean for industry?

The refuge industrial policy would be updated to promote industrial development within existing industrial areas of the refuge to benefit the local economy. Expansion of industry would be limited to already modified sites.

What does it mean for agriculture?

Cropland, grassland and early successional vegetation types would increase at the expense of forest habitats. Pastures would be converted to native grasslands over 15 years and managed with fire and grazing to benefit grassland birds.

Alternative D: Forest Land Management

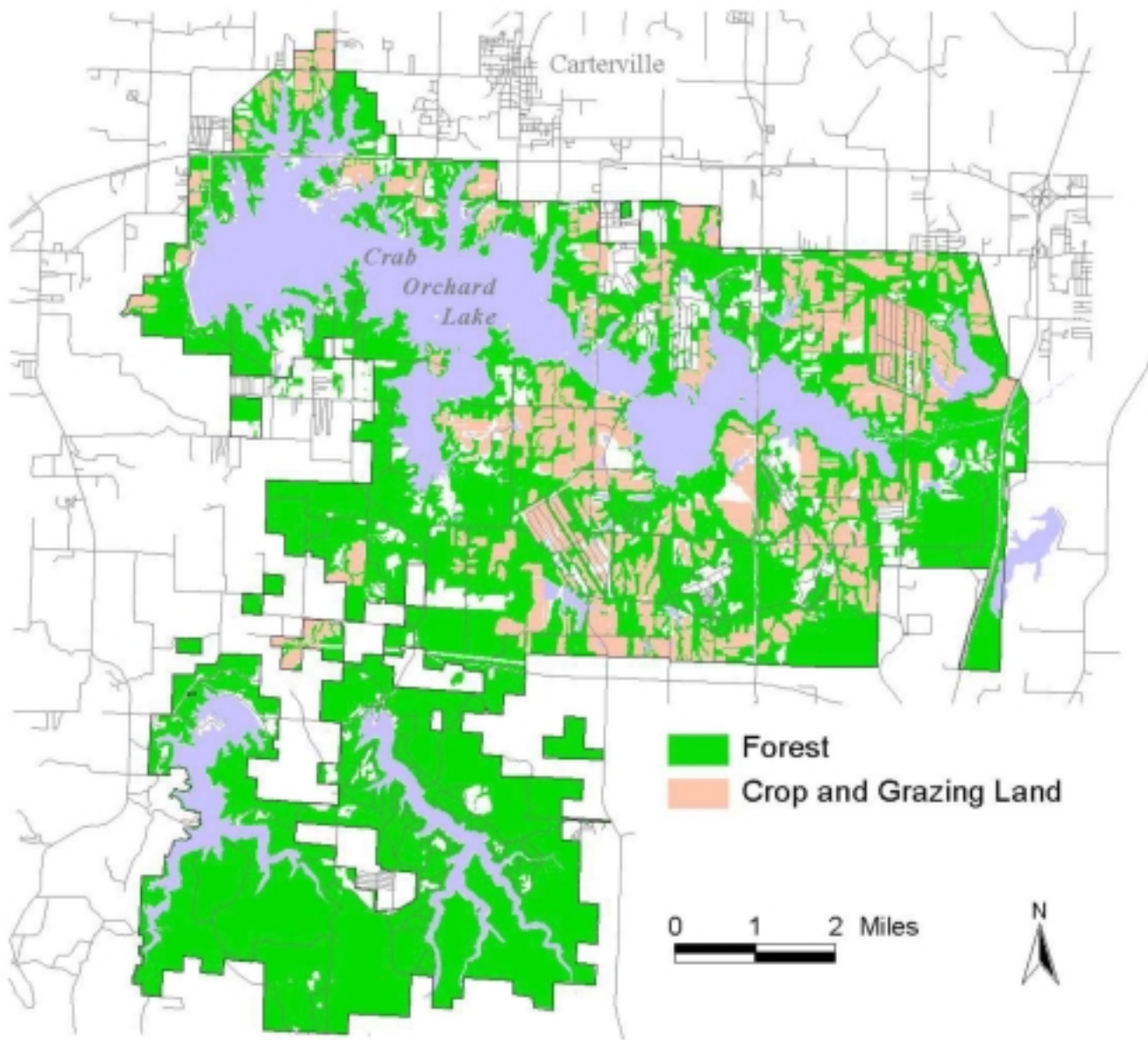
What does it mean for the Refuge?

Under this alternative, management emphasis would be on unfragmented forest habitats, satisfying the refuge's recreation purpose as much as possible within Service budget priorities, and increasing the quality of priority wildlife-dependent recreation without increasing facilities. "This alternative focuses on the historical prevalence of forests throughout much of the area," said Frietsche. "By focusing our management on forests, we are better able to meet the needs of forest interior species. However, there will still be enough grass and agricultural lands within the refuge to provide for geese."

What does it mean for fish and wildlife?

Forest habitats would increase at the expense of cropland, grass-

Current Major Land Cover at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge



land, and early successional vegetation types. Pastures would be converted to native grasslands over 15 years and managed with fire and grazing to benefit grassland birds. Sufficient habitat would be provided for the needs of wintering geese. Water quality efforts would continue within the refuge boundaries. In addition, lake uses on Crab Orchard Lake that are polluting or causing

shoreline erosion would be eliminated or more intensively managed. The refuge would increase its effort to inventory and assess the status of Federal and State threatened and endangered species on the refuge.

The wilderness area would be actively managed under this alternative. If evaluations indicated a need and opportunity, the

refuge would expand the designated wilderness area. The refuge would increase biological monitoring and resource protection within the wilderness and remove the exotic plants and non-native pines.

What does it mean for recreation?

To reconcile non-wildlife-dependent recreational activities, the

refuge would consolidate marinas and picnic areas, upgrade existing boat ramps, maintain the existing two beaches and designate times and places for various types of boating activities. Camping capacity would be reduced, the quality of camping facilities would be upgraded and a two-week maximum stay policy would be implemented. A spectrum of recreational opportunities ranging from more developed recreation at Crab Orchard Lake to less developed opportunities at Devils Kitchen Lake would be provided. Campgrounds at Little Grassy and Devils Kitchen Lakes would be upgraded and primitive campsites added on Devils Kitchen Lake, where gas motors would be prohibited. The quality of hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation opportunities would improve without significant increases in facilities. Group camps would be managed with an emphasis on the Refuge System Mission.

Horseback use would be allowed within the wilderness area and erosion due to trail use would be actively controlled.

What does it mean for industry?

The refuge would update its industrial policy to provide for current industrial tenants and seek to convert to 'green' industries over time. "Focusing on industry that is more environmentally friendly, such as recycling or other waste reduction

businesses, would still provide for industry while helping improve fish and wildlife habitat," said Frietsche. "I'm really exciting about exploring this possibility as a viable alternative." Expansion of any industry would be limited to already modified sites.

What does it mean for agriculture?

Cropland would decrease to make way for forest habitats. Pastures would be converted to native grasslands over 15 years and managed with fire and grazing to benefit grassland birds. Sufficient habitat would be provided for the needs of wintering geese.

"Right now everything is still in general terms. Nothing is set in stone."

Rick Frietsche
Manager, Crab Orchard NWR

The Future is Now

The next step in the CCP process is for the Service to review and further develop each of the four alternatives based upon public comments, biological data, and the Service and refuge missions. Once enough information has been gathered, the Service will select a "preferred" alternative. The preferred alternative will continue to be developed and greater levels of detail will be added. Once this is completed, all information will be compiled into a Draft Environmental Impact

Statement and Comprehensive Conservation Plan which will be distributed for public review and comment.

"Right now everything is still in general terms," said Frietsche. "Nothing is set in stone. It is even possible that new alternatives, or different combinations of existing alternatives, may be considered as we review new comments and continue to collect data." The Service is looking for comments from the public to ensure all interested groups and individuals have an opportunity to have their comments considered. "As I said earlier, no decisions have been made," added Frietsche. "But we are moving into that phase of the planning process. The only thing that is certain is that a CCP will be developed and it will affect where, when and how people can enjoy the refuge. So, the future really is now."

The Service is encouraging individuals and organizations to submit written comments by November 1, 2001, to:
Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge
Attn: CCP Comments
8588 Route 148
Marion, IL 62959

You can also contact us through the Internet at:
<http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/cotop.htm>; or by e-mail to:
conwr-ccp@fws.gov.